

Half Adam?

A sermon by Larry Kirkpatrick

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Postmoderns, Businessmen, and Farmers

We may assure ourselves that it is especially at the cross where good and bad theology meet. We live in a queasy time. Few wish to label viewpoints “bad” or “good.” Nevertheless, the most crucial topics often meet at the cross. What about the incarnation—Jesus taking human flesh? Is this an unimportant doctrine?

Some year and half ago, one worker said, “I just cannot imagine a post-modern person in Europe, a business man in Asia or Latin America, any more than a farmer in Africa will care one iota whether Christ had the nature of man before the Fall or after.”

In the same talk, that worker admits that there is a question of whether or not we can gain victory. To this he responds, “Of course we can, but that will not be by settling the precise human nature of Christ.” The power for victory, He insists (and rightly), comes from Christ the risen. We are to look to Him for help. Agreed.

Still, one senses that, for some among us, any gaining of victory is an almost tangential question. It seems to be enough for some that one experience an occasional victory. God understands our sin problem and doesn't really expect us to resist unto blood.

To that, we refuse to agree. What was perhaps sufficient for many hundreds of years may not be sufficient for the end-time. Not just our own salvation is at stake, but the verdict concerning the very character of God. I say again, it is at the cross where good and bad theology meet. At the cross, Jesus' humanity was crushed, His person sacrificed for us. Was it, then, some alien humanity, or a humanity identical to our own in every essential respect that had the nails driven through it? It does matter, as we will now show.

Mediatorial Gap Filled By Mary

Apollinaris of Laodicea (died 390 A.D.) taught that Jesus had a human body and soul but a divine mind. To simplify, Jesus was like us from the neck down and unlike us from the neck up.

Apollinaris' contemporary, Gregory of Nazianzus, opposed his teachings concerning Jesus, writing,

That which He has not assumed He has not healed; but that which is united to His Godhead is also saved. If only half Adam fell, then that which Christ assumes and saves may be half also; but if the whole of his nature fell, it must be united to the whole nature of Him that was begotten, and so be saved as a whole. Let them not, then, begrudge us our complete salvation, or clothe the Saviour only with bones and nerves and the portraiture of humanity (Gregory of Nazianzus, First Epistle Against Apollinaris, Epistle 51 to Cledonius).

Gregory points out that if Apollinaris is right, then in Jesus we have a Savior only from the neck down but not from the neck up. Then in Christ we have only the portraiture of humanity, only a likeness or a half Adam.

Is the nature of Christ an issue unimportant to a postmodern, a businessman, a farmer? Harry Johnson, in his study on *The Humanity of Christ*, considers the rise in the Catholic Church of Mariology, and makes this telling observation:

It is precisely because belief in the humanity of Jesus had been weakened, with a resultant weakening of His mediatorial position, that there arose the necessity for the emergence of the Virgin Mary and the saints, who possessed a distinct humanity, and who could therefore fulfill a real mediatorial position (Harry Johnson, *The Humanity of Christ*, p. 199).

Let us be sober. There are today no shortage of postmoderns, businessmen, and farmers who consider Mary as one who mediates for them! Make no mistake; the locomotive of history pulls many dogma-filled boxcars down the rails to our own day, and our world many centuries

later is decidedly influenced by ideas of long ago. What we believe about Jesus' humanity impacts whether we even think that we can overcome.

One with whom we are more familiar—Ellen White—put the question thus:

If Christ had a special power which it is not the privilege of man to have, Satan would have made capital of this matter. The work of Christ was to take from the claims of Satan his control of man, and He could do this only in the way that He came—a man, tempted as a man, rendering the obedience of a man (*Selected Messages*, vol. 3, p. 139).

Did Christ come to earth with a push button in His pocket? Could He push the button at any time and access His own divine power? Did He walk this earth in costume masking His deity? What powers did He possess during His sojourn in our human flesh?

While Human, What Powers Did Jesus Possess?

Someone wrote to Ellen White and asked more or less this very question. Hear her response:

The point you inquire of me is, In our Lord's great scene of conflict in the wilderness, apparently under the power of Satan and his angels, was He capable, in His human nature, of yielding to these temptations? I will try to answer this important question: As God He could not be tempted: but as a man He could be tempted, and that strongly, and could yield to the temptations. His human nature must pass through the same test and trial Adam and Eve passed through. His human nature was created; it did not even possess the angelic powers. It was human, identical with our own. He was passing over the ground where Adam fell. He was now where, if He endured the test and trial in behalf of the fallen race, He would redeem Adam's disgraceful failure and fall, in our own humanity (*Selected Messages*, vol. 3, p. 129).

Jesus' humanity was "identical to our own," and "it did not even possess the angelic powers." His deity could not be tempted; His humanity could, indeed, it was the only part of Him that could—and that strongly. His problem was never a temptation for the divine to use the

human, for the divine could not be tempted. His problem was the temptation for the human to use the divine.

More than this, as God He had rights to use the divine. But if He did so, Satan would have made capital of this matter. As God He had right to use His own divine power. But as man He had no right to divine power, only of making a plea to the Father and trusting in the Father's power.

Surely we see the difference. He either remained in possession of a power which we do not possess, or He did not. Mrs. White says that His humanity did not even possess the angelic powers.

But then we read something like this in a recent Sabbath School Quarterly:

Jesus is fully God! Had one or several of the divine attributes been lost during the incarnation, we would have had less than the incarnation of God. . . . Though fully God, Jesus placed everything He had under the authority of the Father, but in doing that He did not divest Himself of any of His divine attributes. During the incarnation there was a concealment of the divine in Jesus, yet deity was always fully present.

We agree that Jesus was and is fully God. We agree even that in every miracle executed in Jesus' ministry, divinity flashed through humanity. But we pause to ask *whose* divinity flashed through humanity. And the Bible answers:

Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of Myself: but the Father that dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works (John 14:10).

Jesus during His incarnation did not possess even the angelic powers. The supernatural works manifest in His ministry were the works not of Himself but of the Father.

You will recall another incident. Jesus is exhausted from the ministrations of the day. He rests sound asleep in the steerage of a fishing boat on the Sea of Galilee. The wind comes up with all fierceness and the boat is so harshly tossed upon the waves that even these hearty fishermen with Jesus fear for their very lives. They wake Jesus and plead for His help. Immediately He stands in the boat and utters command. The tumult ceases. The waters cease roiling. Peace returns to the lake. What happened? Jesus' "Peace, be still" was a prayer to His Father to please still the storm. Do you doubt? Then listen:

When Jesus was awakened to meet the storm, He was in perfect peace. There was no trace of fear in word or look, for no fear was in His heart. But He rested not in the possession of almighty power. It was not as the 'Master of earth and sea and sky' that He reposed in quiet. That power He had laid down, and He says, 'I can of Mine own self do nothing.' John 5:30. He trusted in the Father's might. It was in faith—faith in God's love and care—that Jesus rested, and the power of that word which stilled the storm was the power of God (Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 336).

Jesus in the boat "rested not in the possession of almighty power . . . that power He had laid down."

But is there Bible evidence for this position? Ellen White seems plain enough, referring repeatedly and explicitly to powers not in Jesus' possession. What saith the scriptures?

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross (Philippians 2:5-8).

Look at what we have here. A command for our minds to be like Christ's mind—something impossible under the Apollinaris plan. We have Jesus who is unambiguously noted as being God. But then we have it (verse 7) that He made himself of no reputation. This is a gentle

way of translating what is really there in the underlying Greek. Literally, Jesus *ekenosined* Himself—that is, He emptied Himself.

Of what did He empty Himself? Our passage says that Jesus changes forms. He is in the form of God and He empties Himself and takes upon Him the form of a servant—the form of a man. In *form*—a human one—He proceeds. In that form He is obedient all the way to the cross.

Remember now, He is not in possession of almighty power, or in possession even of angel-level powers. Why? Because these powers He has laid down. John tells us “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). The Word *became* flesh. The Word did not cease being the Word; Jesus did not cease being God; but the word changed Himself. He did not change into a half Adam, a mere portraiture of a man. He became flesh. He became as fully human—as fully in nature a fallen human—as are you and I.

But John did not end there.

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

Jesus became as human as we are, He emptied Himself of at least certain of His divine prerogatives, and yet His glory was seen. The question was not whether Jesus, as God, could glow in the dark, but whether the divine character could glow in the flesh. Could God become a man, be burdened by all that we are burdened by, and yet live a life without sinning?

But let's go beyond just proving that Jesus was not in possession of almighty power via Ellen White quotes. What of the Scriptures?

Attributes of Deity

We do have indisputable evidence in the Bible that Jesus emptied Himself of or laid down certain attributes of His deity. For example, as a man like ourselves, Jesus could not be everywhere present. Omnipresence is one of the traits ascribed to deity. In His incarnation, Jesus experienced, for the first time, what it was like not to be everywhere present.

But let's consider another attribute—omniscience, all-knowingness. As God Jesus had all knowledge. But when He walked this earth as a man, did He?

In Matthew 24 His disciples asked Him when would the end come. His answer is found in verse 36: "Of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but My Father only." Here Jesus disclaims knowledge of the precise timing. But it is more explicit in Mark 13:32: "But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father."

Luke 2:52 says that Jesus grew in wisdom and knowledge. This means that He could not have known everything.

Some are at pains to prove Jesus retained His omniscience but used it selectively. A look at their list of texts is not persuasive. And yet, they remain insistent that Jesus never actually laid aside His omniscience, because "to do so would mean that Jesus ceased to be God."

Fine. Give me the verse for that. Just one will do. And whatever you come up with, cannot we respond with stronger arguments? That, if the Word becomes flesh He ceases to be God? (John 1:14). Or that if He abandons the form of God and takes on the form of a man (Philippians 2:6, 7), He would then cease to be God? Such arguments, at least, would have a

Scriptural basis. But the argument adopted has no such basis. It assumes—out of thin air—a definition of God and then refuses any modification of this definition.

No. Jesus did not walk this earth in omniscience—a power that we do not ourselves have.

Carrying the Button in His Pocket?

Where the inspired writings say that Jesus was *not* in possession of certain of His powers of deity, men because of their dogmas about Him say, “Oh, yes He was.” They insist that He was carrying the button in His pocket, that He could at any time during His human experience directly use His own divine power—a special power which it is not the privilege of man to have. And, after all, what is the difference here?

Suppose you have an errand and you must pass through a very bad neighborhood. You would feel more secure if you had a loaded gun in your pocket. You would be in a dangerous situation but at least you would be “packing heat.” But if you have to go and all that you have is a cell phone, you will not feel as secure. If an emergency arises, you will have to call someone else for help. One situation requires faith only in yourself, the other requires faith in someone outside of yourself. Which situation requires more faith? Which is more like the situation of the believer?

A man with a gun would be a wolf among wolves; a believer armed only with faith is a sheep among wolves (Matthew 10:16). We remind that Jesus came not as wolf but Lamb. With murderers on His track day by day, He trusted in His Father to protect Him. It is especially important for the example part of His mission that He share in our situation of weakness (Isaiah 53:4; John 2:25; Philippians 2:7, 8; Hebrews 2:18; 4:15). If He would be our example of living

by faith in God outside of Him, then He cannot carry the emergency button in His pocket with Him.

Again, we must bear in mind the necessity of His being one with us in a very close sense. Gregory said that, "That which He has not assumed He has not healed; but that which is united to His Godhead is also saved." God told us through Isaiah that it is "with *His* stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5). His suffering must be our suffering. He must live in our flesh, take stripes, wounds, endure temptations in our flesh, in order to defeat sin in our flesh.

Romans 8:3, 4 has it that

What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

He overcame in our kind of humanity.

Ellen White writes,

Bear in mind that Christ's overcoming and obedience is that of a true human being. In our conclusions, we make many mistakes because of our erroneous views of the human nature of our Lord. When we give, to His human nature, a power that it is not possible for man to have in his conflicts with Satan, we destroy the completeness of His humanity. His imputed grace and power He gives to all who receive Him by faith. The obedience of Christ to His Father was the same obedience that is required of man.

Man cannot overcome Satan's temptations without divine power to combine with his instrumentality. So with Jesus Christ, He could lay hold of divine power. He came not to our world to give the obedience of a lesser God to a greater, but as a man to obey God's Holy Law, and in this way He is our example.

The Lord Jesus came to our world, not to reveal what a God could do, but what a man could do, through faith in God's power to help in every emergency. Man is, through faith, to be a partaker in the divine nature, and to overcome every temptation wherewith he is

beset. The Lord now demands that every son and daughter of Adam through faith in Jesus Christ, serve Him in human nature which we now have (Ellen G. White, Manuscript 1, 1892).

Jesus' overcoming is that of a true human being. The entire thrust of these paragraphs is what God can do in human nature. The completeness of His humanity is compromised if Jesus retains in Himself a power that it is not possible for man to have in his conflicts with Satan.

Jesus did not walk about in possession of divine power, but, like you and like me, "He could lay hold of divine power." Of course. Jesus knew the promise of God in Isaiah 27:5: "Let him take hold of My strength, that he may make peace with Me; and he shall make peace with Me (Isaiah 27:5).

Jesus did not come to our world to offer the obedience of one God to another. He came as a man to obey God's holy law. Jesus served Him in the human nature which we now have; we are to serve Him in human nature which we now have.

Conclusion

We have ranged through history today, sometimes noting the words of theologians and philosophers. We seek not to lift them up, but, in some cases, their words are of interest as they provoke our thought. Hear Soren Kierkegaard writing in 1848:

Christ's life here on earth is the paradigm; I and every Christian are to strive to model our lives in likeness to it, and this is the primary subject of preaching, since it is to serve this—to keep me up to the mark when I want to dawdle, to fortify when one becomes disheartened. In this way He is indeed the paradigm in the situation of contemporaneity. . . . But Christendom has abolished Christ; yet, on the other hand, it wants to inherit Him, His great name, to make use of the enormous consequences of His life. . . . Christendom increases in numbers year by year—no wonder, for the majority are eager to be along when

it is a matter of nothing more than celebrating and riding in the parade (Soren Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, p. 107).

What does he say? He is reminding the individual Christian to live his life in echo of Christ's life. He is also accusing the church of teaching some inconsequential, soft-serve version of the gospel, where, instead of copying Christ, we are doing nothing more than celebrating and riding in a parade of pretenders.

And yet, what else is to be expected if we think that Jesus had the red button onboard, that He could reach into His pocket at any time, and tap a special power which it is not our privilege to have?

Assuming our humanity,

He cast out the spirits with His word, and healed all that were sick: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses (Matthew 8:16, 17).

Here is the extent of His unity with us. Or as Paul puts it, Our Father

Hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him (2 Corinthians 5:21).

This is a message for postmoderns, for businessmen, and for farmers. It is for those who have been taught that Jesus was so far away from them that they must rely upon Mary and Saint This and Saint That as their mediators, persons whose humanity is not disputed.

We play into the devil's hands when we let Him shroud our Lord in dogmas that strip Him of the completeness of His humanity. One reason that God has raised up His Seventh-day Adventist Church is to tell the truth about Jesus—both His deity and His humanity. Gregory nailed it. Either we have a Savior or we have a portrait of one, a half Adam. But Jesus came, defeated sin in fallen flesh, was accepted, resumed those aspects of His deity He had laid down

(except for omnipresence), and returned victorious to heaven. He never stopped being God. If we are united to Him then we are united to the godhead. Then, as He trusted in the Father's power to live a sinless life, we may trust in exactly the same way and live without sinning.

What Jesus was and is is central to the gospel. May His church rise in affirmation that Jesus came in the flesh (1 John 4:1-4).

Biographical Note: Pastor Larry Kirkpatrick is a convert to the Adventist faith. Since 1994 he has served in the ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He holds degrees from Southern Adventist University and the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary. His work has included research assistant for the Ellen G. White Estate, pioneering Adventist internet ministry, involvement in GYC, and presenter at the 50th Anniversary *Questions on Doctrine* Conference. He is author of the books *Real Grace for Real People* and *Cleanse and Close*. For many years his sermons and papers have been published on the internet. Larry and wife Pamela have served churches in Nevada, Utah, and California. The Kirkpatricks presently serve at the [Mentone church](#) near Loma Linda, California.